

SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA - REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS.

1. Introduction.

I am responding to aspects of both terms of reference, in particular to the examination of the content of the Museum's permanent exhibition and to the future priorities to be addressed by the Museum, including the development of permanent exhibitions.

My observations are primarily about the content and presentation of these exhibits in the First Australians Gallery, located mainly on the Ground Floor at the Museum, that are concerned with the record of contact between Aborigines and non-Aborigines and with recent developments in Aboriginal affairs relations.

My personal reaction to these exhibits was generally one of disappointment, as there does not seem to be a common theme drawing together the displays in this area. While there is much in the history of Aboriginal/white relations that was harsh, criminal and unjust, these displays still convey a generally pessimistic view and perpetuate a negative image. There is insufficient about the positive achievements of Aboriginal people in recent times.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the extent of factual errors that require immediate correction

2. Map of missions, reserves and children's homes.

I consider that this display requires substantial revision.

Historically, there were many institutions where Aboriginal people lived. While there was much overlap, there were four types of such institutions:-

a. Missions. These were often village type areas (mission stations), that sometimes also operated farming/agricultural properties and sometimes also children's homes. They were conducted by various religious organisations.

On the other hand, in some places, missionaries resided on government Aboriginal Stations or in country towns and carried out a chaplaincy-type role. There is sometimes confusion because the term "mission" is used colloquially by some Aboriginal people to refer to any place where Aboriginal people lived, irrespective of whether or not there was any connection with a missionary society.

b. Aboriginal Stations. These were conducted by government agencies and contained village areas, school, administration block, store, workshops, first aid clinic, hall etc. Sometimes Aboriginal Stations carried out farming/agricultural activities or other industries. Some Aboriginal stations were known as Aboriginal Settlements or "Communities". (It may be noted that the term "community" is now extended to refer to any local grouping of Aboriginal people, that is sometimes an aggregation of people from various locations.)

c. Aboriginal reserves. All crown lands set aside for Aboriginal purposes were legally gazetted as Aboriginal reserves. They ranged from small areas to very large tracts of country. Small housing or camping areas for Aboriginal people near country towns were often designated as Aboriginal reserves. All Aboriginal Stations and some mission stations were located on

Aboriginal reserves. On the other hand, Arnhem Land and the Central Reserve were Aboriginal reserves, until about 1977, with mission stations and Aboriginal settlements located around the outer fringes. Most surviving Aboriginal reserves have now been transferred into the management and control of Aboriginal trusts or associations.

d. Homes for Aboriginal children. At various times, these were operated both by State and Northern Territory government agencies and by missionary societies. Some were associated with Aboriginal Stations or mission stations and some were conducted only as children's homes.

Discussion.

The wall map has confused these different types of institutions/agencies and has made many mistakes. For example, in New South Wales, although there were about 600 separate Aboriginal reserves, only a small number of locations is shown on the map, and these were mostly Aboriginal Stations, but even so, it is incomplete.

Cootamundra was a children's home (1912-1969).

Parramatta was a children's home (1814-1823), not a reserve

Coraki was not a mission but a small Aboriginal reserve with a number of houses and a school.

Maloga was a private mission station in New South Wales, but is shown in Victoria.

Myall Creek was a massacre site, not a reserve.

In Victoria, there were about 50 reserves, but only a few places are shown.

Lake Tyers, Framlingham and Lake Condah were all reserves and (at different times) mission stations and later Aboriginal Stations. There had also been children's homes (dormitories) at Lake Tyers and Lake Condah.

Koo Wee Rup was not a reserve.

Echuca was not a reserve, and there is a spelling error.

A number of children's homes is shown at Melbourne; but none was specifically for Aboriginal children who sometimes formed only a small percentage of the residents. They were operated by various welfare agencies, but not by any Aboriginal agencies.

By the same thinking, Ballarat Orphanage could have been included on the map; although it was not specifically an Aboriginal institution, a number of Aboriginal children resided there in the 1950s.

While I do not suggest that they should have been included on the map, there were similar children's home in other states (eg, Minda Remand Centre at Lidcombe and Mt Penang Training School for Boys at Gosford in NSW) where Aboriginal children in state care were sometimes resident.

There is an interesting link that could be developed for a future display. The Coranderrk Aboriginal Station (Victoria) was located near Healesville. The Sir Colin McKenzie (Healesville) Sanctuary now occupies part of the original Coranderrk Station land.

The map omits the one Aboriginal reserve (Naas Creek, 1895-1899) that was located in the ACT, before the land for the Territory was acquired from NSW.

The Wreck Bay Aboriginal Station at Jervis Bay possibly warrants a special place on the map; it was administered by the NSW government on behalf of the ACT administration from 1928

to 1966 but was not declared a reserve until 1987.

Because of the large number of institutions where Aboriginal people lived, it is realised that there are difficulties in representing them all on one map. However there were several maps compiled by Commonwealth and State agencies that could be consulted. There was also a valuable map of Aboriginal Lands published by the Commonwealth mapping authority about 15 years ago.

Although it is not on this map, there is a separate wall display about Hollywood Aboriginal Reserve at Yass. It was not a "mission" and I would question the accuracy of the explanation given for the name.

3. Massacres.

I am aware that there has been debate concerning this display. It is appropriate that attention should be drawn to this aspect of Aboriginal history. However, I would refer to valuable material on Victorian massacre sites researched by Ian Clark that should be consulted and doubtless there is similar material for other States and the Territories.

4. The Stolen Generations.

I am concerned about the presentation of this material, which is provocative and controversial. It needs to be said that the practice of removal of Aboriginal children from their families began in Sydney at the end of the eighteenth century. Many governments followed this practice through to the 1960s and later. Aboriginal children were removed for various reasons - child protection, death or desertion of natural parents, health factors, educational reasons, to place teenagers in employment, to effect the depopulation of a reserve, with the consent of parents to provide better opportunities for their children, for legal adoption, as a consequence of juvenile offending etc.

It also needs to be pointed out that many more non-Aboriginal children were separated from their natural families under similar circumstances and for much the same reasons as Aboriginal children, and that some were subjected to abuse by their carers and some were denied information about their origins, as with some Aboriginal children.

The facts about the numbers of Aboriginal children involved are controversial, but were not 1 in 3, as has been claimed in some sources. In some districts, the separation of children was not common; while only in some areas and at certain periods, the numbers may have been 1 in 10.

It also needs to be pointed out that the "assimilation policy" has been misinterpreted as being the reason for the removal of Aboriginal children. This is too simplistic and there is little documentation that this policy was specifically defined to sanction and justify the removal of Aboriginal children from their natural families. None the less, at different times, many governments and some missionary societies followed the practice.

It is suggested that the treatment of the display on Bomaderry Home is insensitive. This was a small non-government home that cared for relatively few Aboriginal children. The United Aborigines Mission has subsequently achieved a reasonable reconciliation with its former residents. It was of much less significance than many other children's homes such as

Cootamundra Girls' Training Home, Sister Kate's Home (Perth) or The Bungalow (Alice Springs).

5. Framlingham - shack.

I am concerned that the shack is not an accurate representation for the Framlingham area nor of many humpies or shacks that were common on many Aboriginal reserves and camping places in southern Australia. There was much variation in the construction of shacks but tenting and salvaged building materials were often used. I would have expected that the roof and walls of the display shack could have been made from slabs of overlapping bark, from pieces of flattened out kerosene tins or from salvaged corrugated iron. The inside walls would probably have been lined with bagging or hessian and possibly covered with sheets of newspaper pasted on to keep out draughts. There may have been a bough shed at the front, to provide shade in hot weather. There would have been some furniture (perhaps make-shift beds, cupboards from boxes, a suitcase, a table and oil drums used as seats). There would probably have been a hearth or grate and a suspended pot or kettle in the fireplace. The floor would have been quite flat (not rough) and bare earth or possibly covered with a piece of linoleum. A number of architects have studied this type of housing.

It is pointed out that the display is vague about the location of Framlingham. It gives an incorrect date for the gazettal of the reserve. Any shacks at Framlingham would have been removed in about 1938, when the Victorian government built about 12 new houses on the reserve.

In a related display about Mr Banjo Clark, the boxing gloves in the exhibit look too modern.

6. Aboriginal Wedding - Warrnambool.

It is implied in this display that in 1867 there were legal restrictions on the marriage of Aboriginal people. In Victoria there was no specific legislation relating to Aboriginal people until 1869, and there were never special provisions on the marriage of Aboriginal people. The form displayed was a normal marriage certificate. The legal situation was different in some other States and the Northern Territory, where official permission was required.

7. Tabulation of Civil Rights.

The whole question of the civil rights of Aboriginal people and their access to social services and other benefits is most important and warrants a better display.

The information in the table displayed is not correct for Victoria. I think that this table may have been sourced from a book by Shirley Andrews. Better information has been provided by McCorquodale and by Chesterman and Galligan. It should be recognised that the details necessarily altered according to the date and the state being referred to.

8. Jackson's Track.

I thought that this display contains misleading information. Aboriginal people were not "escaping from Lake Tyers." They were not subject to special Aboriginal legislation in the

Jindivick area. However, they did encounter stress with the enforcement by council officers of general local government ordinances on housing and health standards. This was itself unusual, as in many locations, local authorities "turned the blind eye" and ignored the substandard housing and health conditions of Aboriginal people living in their area.

9. Salvation Army.

This display is hardly typical for Victoria as few Aboriginal people are members of the Salvation Army. However, the Salvation Army did significant work with Aboriginal people at Purga, Queensland and at Point McLeay, South Australia.

10. Jimmy Little.

There is an interesting story behind this display as the Little family was associated with Aboriginal concert parties at Cumerogunga and Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Stations (NSW) in the 1930s. There were similar musical groups in other districts.

11. Overhead Videos.

a. I noted errors in relation to the NSW Sesqui-Centenary celebrations at Sydney Cove in 1938 and Mr Hero Black from Menindee.

b. Another clip implies that Mrs Faith Bandler is an Aboriginal person.

c. Material about the 1967 Referendum (in two places) is misleading. The Referendum had great symbolic importance but it was not about citizenship nor about the census.

The Commonwealth Parliament always had power to make special laws for the people of all other races. In 1967, it was given concurrent powers with the State to make special laws also for the people of the Aboriginal race in any State (that is, "full bloods"). The Commonwealth already had general authority under all other heads of power to make ordinary laws for Aboriginal people and between 1901 and 1966 it had passed about 50 Acts about Aboriginal people, concerning such matters as the franchise and social services benefits.

The Referendum did not affect about 75% of people identifying as "Indigenous"; it did not touch the Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and the ACT; it did not affect any people of part Aboriginal descent; and did it affect Torres Strait Islanders, as they did not come within the Constitutional definition of "the aboriginal race."

Also, despite the popular belief, Aboriginal people were not excluded from the census. They were counted to some extent at all censuses from 1911 to 1966. Full blood "Aboriginal natives" were not counted only "in reckoning the numbers of the people", that is, when deciding the quota for members of the House of Representatives or for distributing Commonwealth money to the States in proportion to population. This was altered by the Referendum.

The Referendum was not concerned with voting rights nor with civil rights of Aboriginal people.

This material should be revised and clarified.

12. Pre-history and Physical Anthropology.

The display (first floor) on the work of Black and Mulvaney should be developed to stress the rapid growth of knowledge of the antiquity of Aboriginal people. Within the last 50 years, the time frame for the arrival of mankind in Australia has been pushed back from about 4000 years to more than 50 000 years.

13. Curatorial Matters.

I did note that many of the displays of Aboriginal art and artefacts on the first floor are not protected by glass and may be liable to deterioration from being touched and exposed to dust borne by visitors.

I believe that there may be some images and objects on public display that should not be viewed by certain Aboriginal people. I did not see any warning, drawing this matter to the attention of Aboriginal visitors.

14. Matters Not Included.

A preliminary consideration of the displays suggests that most of the following issues are not dealt with and some would warrant inclusion in future exhibitions:-

Definitions

Who is an Aboriginal?
Aboriginal/ Aborigines
Torres Strait Islander
Indigenous

Policy shifts and changes

Conciliation
Clash and retaliation
Protection
Discrimination
Welfare
Assimilation
Integration
Self Determination
Self Management
Reconciliation

Legislation affecting Aboriginal people

Government agencies

Funding of Aboriginal programs, over time

Aboriginal-controlled and self-help organisations

Demography

- Fall and increase of population numbers
- Unreliability of census and survey figures
- Population distribution over time and between districts
- Morbidity and mortality
- Other social indicators eg poverty

Aboriginal education.

Inquiries into Aboriginal issues, eg Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

Land Rights and Native Title



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